



PHOTO BY PENNY RANDALL / THE MERIDIAN STAR

WHAT'S YOUR MESSAGE TO THE TROOPS?

Amanda Bratu is a homemaker who lives in Meridian. She is shown here with her 3-year-old son, Daniel. Here is Amanda's message: "My brother-in-law, Jerry Bratu, left on Christmas Day. He's with the 150th Combat Engineer Battalion of the Mississippi National Guard. I want him to know we're praying for him."

Making it through the 'Red Zone'

Master-at-Arms Petty Officer 1st Class Jason Brush is on temporary duty at Camp Victory South in Iraq. He shipped out Oct. 7, 2004, and hopes to be back home at Naval Air Station Meridian's Security Department sometime in April.

Jason enjoys hunting, fishing and family activities and is a member of St. Albans Episcopal Church in Birmingham, Ala. Here's his letter home.

Hello folks back in Meridian,

I am currently assigned to the Protective Service Detail of Maj. Gen. William Brandenburg, deputy commanding general for Multi-National Forces Iraq, Detainee Operations.

The general also serves as the commanding general of Task Force 134 — which is responsible for the day-to-day operations of all enemy prisoners of war, insurgent arrestees and the criminal court of Iraq.

Three to four times a week we travel, usually by convoy, from Camp Victory to the International Zone (formerly the Green Zone).

We actually have armored Humvees and I am usually either the chase vehicle driver, top side gunner or convoy commander, depending on the mission. The drive from here to the "IZ" is a 10-mile drive through the Red Zone, also referred to as "Indian Country," where we frequently take fire and have, on a few occasions, engaged in combat long enough for us to get out of the danger area.

The treatment of prisoners is a big deal for both the U.S. and the Iraqi government, who are trying to gain the trust of the Iraqi people.

I have been fortunate to meet the prime minister of Iraq, Ayad Allawi, and the entire cabinet.

This could go on for days, but that is the gist of it all. I have taken hundreds of pictures and have sent a few back to The States when I got the chance.

I am doing fine. If the bad guys would stop mortaring us every night, things would be much better. At first you knew about what time they would come, and we just stayed in the hard buildings until it was all over; now they are sporadically firing at us. It is a hit-and-miss game around here. Since I have been here, only a handful of people have actually been killed or even hurt by them.

Only 75 more days left in Iraq.

Jason Brush

Daddy misses daughter's firsts

Kenyetta Jimison, 23, is a wife and mother. She works in Chancery Court at the Lauderdale County Courthouse. Her husband is Jason Jimison of the Mississippi Army National Guard's 367th Maintenance Company. The unit is based in DeKalb. Kenyetta and Jason were married on April 19, 2003, and have one daughter, Kennedy Ja'Lese.

By Kenyetta Jimison
special to The Star

Jason's unit was put on alert for about a month before they were actually called up for duty. Kennedy was only about 2½ months old when Jason left, so she really didn't know who he was.

The unit left on Sept. 5, 2003, heading to Washington and, from Washington, to Iraq.

I was so lost and disappointed when he had to leave us. We were only married a couple of months and I had a new baby to take care of. Kennedy and I moved in with my parents so we wouldn't have to live alone.

It was so hard for me when Jason left. It was hard to watch the news and things of that nature. I can remember watching the news sometimes and hearing about the guys being killed and having to wait sometimes a week before I heard from Jason. I waited ... to hear from him, not knowing if he was OK or what. It was nerve-wracking, it was stressful and so, so hard. But through it

all, with faith and prayer, I made it.

Jason missed all of Kennedy's first things. Her first words, crawling, laughing out loud, holding her own bottle, pulling up, playing patty-cake, waving and saying bye-bye, standing alone, walking, her first birthday, her first Christmas and her first Easter.

When Kennedy was about 5½ months old, she had to have surgery. She had to have a cyst removed from her forehead. Jason was in Iraq at the time, so he had no idea what was going on until he called me one morning on my cell phone and we were in the hospital. She recovered just fine.

We had a lot of obstacles to overcome while Jason was in Iraq, but we had faith in God and we prayed all we could — God answered our prayers.

My parents, James and Dora Moore, really made a difference for us — they were there all the way.

My brother, James Moore Jr., stepped in and took up the slack with Kennedy. Even though he was not "daddy," he played a big role with Kennedy by being a male figure in her young life. My brother-in-law and his wife, Chris and Tammie Parker, also stood behind us and they were very supportive.

Jason and his unit returned home safely on Nov. 24, 2004. Words can't express how happy we were. Kennedy is loving the fact that "daddy" is home and she is truly a "daddy's girl."

My heart goes out to all of



SUBMITTED PHOTO

DADDY'S GIRL

Jason Jimison holds his daughter, Kennedy Ja'Lese, who was just an infant when her father's Mississippi Army National Guard unit was called up to serve in Iraq.

the soldiers who are still in Iraq Stay prayerful, stay strong and those that are Iraq-bound. be encouraged.

SPEAK UP

Here's how these Meridian residents answered the question, "Why do you display one — or several — ribbons on your car in honor of our troops in the Middle East?"



Truman

"This is my way of letting them know that I'm behind them all the way. I also have a brother-in-law in the military, so I feel a connection to them."

Stephanie Truman,
SuperStop manager

"I have three on my car. One represents my daughter, who is in the Navy; one represents my son, who is in the Army; and one represents my brother, who is in the Army Reserve."

Linda Trotter,
Jones Cleaners

"I have three ribbons on my car. I was in Desert Storm, so I know what it is like. I think the ribbons are a good idea. It's a good way to show local support for the troops."

Eundray Houston,
Houston Construction

"My son-in-law has served a tour of duty overseas for the current war in Iraq, so I feel a connection to all of those who have served and are serving. This is my way of showing my support to them and saying 'thank you.'"

Cynthia F. Kennedy,
cosmetologist

"It's a way of being truthful to the troops, even though I feel they are there for a wrong cause. We're losing lives over there, but we still have to show our

support for our troops, and that we care and pray for their safety."

Levern Taylor,
Lauderdale County
Farm Supply

"One of my friends is in the infantry out of Jackson. His job is to accompany wounded soldiers or their family members back to The States. While he is not over there (fighting), he is dedicated to the cause. This is my way of showing my support."

Marsha Ramia,
Meridian Public Schools

"I have five on my car. I want to show my support to the troops and this is one way of doing it."

Shirley Campbell,
Mr. Rodgers Hamburgers



Taylor